

tive. There was no question of progress, still less of any radical social reconstruction. In the numerous heretical movements of the Middle Ages social aspirations were often combined with criticisms of the luxury and pomp of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The official Church, to which independence of thought among the lower orders was but little less abhorrent when it related to their temporal well-being than when it was concerned with their eternal salvation, frowned upon these dangerous speculations, and sometimes crushed them with a ferocity as relentless as the most savage of the White Terrors of modern history has shown to the most formidable of insurrections.

Intellectually, religious opinion endorsed to the full the static view, which regarded the social order as a thing unalterable, to be accepted, not to be improved.

Except on rare occasions, its spokesmen repeated the conventional doctrine, according to which the feet were born to labour, the hands to fight, and the head to rule. Naturally, therefore, they denounced agitations,

like the communal movement/⁰¹ designed to overturn

that natural order, though the rise of the Free Cities

was one of the glories of mediaeval Europe and the

germ of almost every subsequent advance in civilization.

They referred to questions of economic conduct, not because they were anxious to promote

reforms, but because they were concerned with the maintenance of traditional standards of personal morality, of which economic conduct formed an important part.

Practically, the Church was an immense vested interest, implicated to the hilt in the economic fabric, especially on the side of agriculture and land tenure. Itself the greatest of landowners/it could no more quarrel with the feudal structure than the Ecclesiastical Commission, the largest of mineral owners to-day, can lead a crusade against royalries. The persecution of the Spiritual Franciscans who dared, in